

The Giver

Chapters Fifteen—Seventeen

Literature Focus: Theme

Theme is the central idea in a work of literature. Themes must often be inferred by carefully examining the characters' words and actions, as well as the plot, setting, and mood of the novel. Themes can be expressed in terms of concrete objects such as family and friends, ideas like love and individuality, and experiences such as survival and human connection.

Theme is expressed as a sentence, rather than just a set of related words. Consider the story of Three Little Pigs. One of the lessons the pigs learn is that you can't do shoddy work and expect to survive in the world. They also learn that sometimes you need to rely on family for help. Some might express the theme of the story as *survival*, while other may think the theme is *family*. However, to correctly express a theme, you would need to write the message in sentence form: "Do your best work and it will lead to a happy, healthy life." Or, "In time of need, depend on your family to help you." Both of these are themes of the story.

Directions: Read and answer the questions about the following excerpts from the novel. After examining each pair of quotes, use them to infer a theme from the novel.

First Pair:

Jonas trudged to the bench beside the Storehouse and sat down, overwhelmed with feelings of loss. His childhood, his friendships, his carefree sense of security—all of these things seemed to be slipping away. (p. 135)

1. What does Jonas miss about his childhood? _____

"Warmth," Jonas replied, "and happiness. And—let me think. Family. That it was a celebration of some sort, a holiday. And something else—I can't quite get the word for it." . . . Jonas hesitated. "I certainly liked the memory, though. I can see why it's your favorite. I couldn't quite get the word for the whole feeling for it, the feeling that was so strong in the room."

"Love," The Giver told him.

Jonas repeated it. "Love." It was a word and concept new to him. (pp. 123, 125)

2. How does Jonas "see" love in the memory? _____

3. How do these passages illustrate Jonas's desire for human connection? _____

Express a theme that can be inferred from these two quotes. _____

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Second Pair:

"You Elevens have spent all your years till now learning to fit in, to standardize your behavior, to curb any impulse that might set you apart from the group." (pp. 51-52)

4. How does standardizing one's appearance and behavior help the Elevens fit into their group? _____

He had seen a birthday party, with one child singled out and celebrated on his day, so that now he understood the joy of being an individual, special and unique and proud. (p. 121)

5. Why is Jonas so intrigued by the birthday party? _____

6. How does a person in Jonas's community balance being an individual with being a contributing member of society? _____

7. How is this different from being an individual in our society? _____

What theme does this second pair of quotes reveal? _____

Third Pair:

With his new, heightened feelings, he was overwhelmed by sadness at the way the others had laughed and shouted, playing at war. But he knew that they could not understand why, without the memories. (p. 135)

8. How are the memories influencing Jonas's present life? _____

"It seems to work pretty well that way, doesn't it? The way we do it in our community?" Jonas asked. "I just didn't realize there was any other way, until I received that memory." (p. 125)

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9. What do the memories show Jonas about a different way of life? _____

10. What does the community lose by not having memories? What does it gain? _____

What theme does this third pair of quotes reveal? _____

Fourth Pair:

Jonas nodded. "I liked the feeling of love," he confessed. He glanced nervously at the speaker on the wall, reassuring himself that no one was listening. "I wish we still had that," he whispered. "Of course," he added quickly, "I do understand that it wouldn't work very well. And that it's much better to be organized the way we are now. I can see that it was a dangerous way to live." (p. 126)

11. Why does Jonas think it was "dangerous" way to live? _____

"Things could change, Gabe," Jonas went on. "Things could be different. I don't know how, but there must be some way for things to be different. There could be colors.

"And grandparents," he added, staring through the dimness toward the ceiling of his sleepingroom. "And everybody would have the memories." (p. 128)

12. What would Jonas like to change about the community? _____

13. How could Jonas change his society? Do you think he would be more successful working for change from within or outside of the community? _____

What theme does this fourth pair of quotes reveal? _____
